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ABSTRACT

Even though Nahuatl is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Mexico, it is endangered. Threats include poor support for Nahuatl-speaking communities, migration of Nahuatl speakers to cities where English and Spanish are spoken, prejudicial attitudes toward indigenous languages, lack of contact between small communities of different dialects, and decreasing intergenerational transmission. Schools are not the best places for language revitalization because the Mexican state's policies promote Spanish and perpetuate a degrading stereotypical view of indigenous people. An innovative program organizes workshops during key moments in local ceremonial life, such as patron saint festivities. Workshops are conducted in Nahuatl, and videos narrated in Nahuatl are shown. Audience participation is encouraged by giving books or tapes on which the videos are based to those who can understand or retell the story. Riddle contests and tales, which are highly valued by these communities, are used to introduce alphabetic writing without over-emphasizing literacy. The videos recreate "old" traditions with new technologies and are especially attractive to children. Making language materials available for everyday household use stimulates intergenerational transmission. Interacting with participants enables researchers to determine the current status of Nahuatl and to identify speakers who can help produce materials and conduct workshops. Outcomes have been very positive, and the program is expanding and sharing information with the Nahuatl language seminar in Mexico City. (Contains 16 references.) (TD)

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The Use of Multimedia and the Arts in Language Revitalization, Maintenance, and Development: The Case of the Balsas Nahuas of Guerrero, Mexico

José Antonio Flores Farfán

It is a well-known fact that, in a global context, most of the world's languages are in danger of becoming extinct within a couple of generations. Consider that, of an estimated 6,000 languages spoken worldwide, by 2050, eighty percent of this diversity could be lost (Krauss, 1992). This situation is even more troubling when we realize that many more efforts and resources are allocated to mitigate the demise of biological diversity than to revert linguistic extinction (Cantoni, 1996). To be optimistic, it is easier to revitalize a language than a species (e.g., the case of Hebrew, Fishman, 1991). To be pessimistic, for a number of reasons, including economic and ideological ones, speakers are sometimes not willing to revitalize their language at all. Thus, there are situations in which languages are certainly going to fade and some in which they have indeed faded away. One cannot blame speakers for deciding to give up their language; sometimes they have good reasons for doing so (Cantoni, 1996).

In the field of endangered languages, there exists only a limited set of terms, such as "revitalization," to describe a wide variety of situations. We need a clarification of these vague terms and concepts in order to better describe and understand the various types of situations we are facing. With a clearer understanding of the dynamics of endangered languages, different strategies can be successfully developed for different situations.[1]

For example, compare Mexico and the United States. Even when we can find similar situations between these two countries, there are also very important differences. Judging from official figures, the U.S. apparently has more languages (175, see below) than Mexico (62, Dirección General de Culturas Populares). However, from a comparison of the gross population figures of indigenous peoples in both countries, a different picture emerges. Mexico has a total population of approximately 100 million people, about ten to fifteen percent of whom speak indigenous languages. In comparison, Native Americans in the U.S. make up only one percent of the total population. In other words, in Mexico, estimations of the total indigenous population are between ten to fifteen million people. In the U.S. (including Alaska), there are only approximately two million Native Americans out of a total population of over 250 million in a territory three times the size of Mexico according to a 1999 U.S. Department of Commerce study done through its Economic and Statistics Administration Office.

More important, even though there are fewer resources to support the use of indigenous languages in Mexico than in the U.S., it is more likely that, in Mexico, we can find situations in which indigenous language use is more vital, as such demo-linguistic figures suggest. Thus, in Mexico, in relation to carrying on an intervention proposal oriented to support indigenous languages, the set of terms that would be better applied to a number of situations would include "maintenance" and even "development." In contrast, the key word in the U.S. is "revitalization."[2]

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The need for different terms becomes even clearer when we take into account that, in Mexico, we find indigenous communities that still have a monolingual population, such as the Yucatec Maya. These communities include a considerable number of Elders and even children who still have Spanish as a second language. In contrast, in the US, most Native Americans have English as their first language, and only a few children still learn Native American languages. Moreover, in the U.S., semi- or quasi-speakers of almost all endangered languages count statistically as representatives of one language or language family (Hinton, 1994).

All in all, I will suggest in this paper that the dynamics of endangered language situations often include a mixed bag of cases in which one finds different stages of language shift and maintenance. This is the case in, for example, Arizona, which Krauss (1996, p. 13) considers the state with the most linguistic vitality and which he includes in his "honour roll" of U.S. languages. Thus, the set of terms that range from renewal, restoration, revitalization, and preservation on the one hand, to maintenance and development on the other, can be thought of as a continuum on which endangered languages are categorized: ranging from the almost complete decay of a language to a language of high vitality. In all known regions of language endangerment, one finds a wide spectrum of situations in a single geographical area, as Krauss' (1992) discussion of A, B, C, and D languages also emphasizes. The Balsas area is a good example of a situation that lacks uniformity.

As well as having problems with vague terminology, the field of language revitalization raises a debate between basic and applied research. There is an historical divorce between these two spheres in the social sciences, which at times make research a somewhat sterile exercise.[3] The implications of this division are significant and many; they entail different perspectives and interests that at times are in open contradiction. For instance, compare the perspective of the linguist versus that of the speaker regarding a series of issues. From a Native American perspective, one does not interrupt the Elders or interrogate them while they are speaking. In contrast, a linguist would do this because of his or her interest in clarifying a given aspect of the language and his or her quest for identifying linguistic structures.

Another good example is the different perceptions of what constitutes a language and a dialect of a language (e.g., Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish in Scandinavia or Maya Mopan versus Maya Yucatec in the Maya region). In Mexico, some linguists (most notably Summer Institute of Linguistics linguists) claim that there are around 40 Zapotec languages. In contrast, some speakers perceive only up to four clearly differentiated Zapotec tongues. The same is true for the idea that there are 12 Nahua languages (Suárez, 1983) versus the idea that there is a continuum of intelligibility based more on attitudes than on internal language differences. In other words, are there a number of Nahua dialects in Mexico or a dozen Nahua languages?

An even more dramatic and eloquent illustration of the clash of perspectives between linguists and speakers is the linguists' interests in describing a language

without speakers (i.e., via a corpus) versus the speakers' interest in recovering an endangered language. The same applies to different perspectives on what constitutes a language or a speaker of a language. Compare the purist views of some orthodox linguists versus the actual code-switching and code-mixing that occurs in bilingual use. Or compare the assumptions behind the existence of "ideal" versus "real" quasi- or pseudo-speakers (Flores Farfán, 1999a). Yet another example is the linguists' interests in a given language versus some speakers disinterest in speaking their heritage language (Cantoni, 1996).

All of these definitions differ depending much more on political, economic, or ideological differences than on strictly structural linguistic ones per se, which is a conception that views language as the material medium of the production and reproduction of culture and society, or at least as an epiphenomenon, but not as an independent, de-contextualized, metaphysical entity.

Sketch of Sociolinguistics in Mexico

The divorce between basic and applied research is clearly manifested in the disciplines' practices themselves. Consider the practices of orthodox anthropological linguistics, or what elsewhere has been termed anthropological sociolinguistics (Flores & López, 1989, Flores Farfán, 1999a), one of the sociolinguistic methods that has been employed in Mexico. It searches for speakers of "pure," "exotic" languages, discarding contact phenomena as parenthetical or as marginal realities. When I first studied linguistics, one of the maxims that students were encouraged to follow was to regard Elders (with complete teeth and so on) as the only representatives of the "real" language. This implies studying only one variety of the language and considering it THE language. The researchers' interests in the indigenous language might indirectly have a "revitalizing" effect on the subordinated language, but this result is more as a by-product than a conscious effort.

In contrast, another sociolinguistic trend that has been developed in Mexico corresponds to the sociolinguistics of conflict. This approach tends to overemphasize the influence of Spanish in indigenous communities as part of the inevitable fate of language shift to which, according to its practitioners, sooner or later all indigenous languages are condemned. In this approach, research methods, such as interviewing in Spanish, actually promote Spanish as the dominant language.

Both trends depart from monolingual perspectives of bilingualism. They are derived from a series of idealizations, preconceptions, or biases that carry more political overtones than structural realities (e.g., the ideal speaker of a language in linguistics or even anthropological linguistics). Fortunately, the field of language revitalization and reversal provides the context for a corrective to these trends and suggests a productive interaction between research and intervention, which is still in the early stages of development in Mexico.

The sociolinguistic situation of Indigenous languages in Mexico. As suggested, the situation of indigenous languages in Mexico[4] today can be viewed as part of a continuum. On one end of this continuum is total language shift, in

which languages are extinct or becoming extinct, as is the case with the languages of California (Hinton, 1994), most notably in Baja California. This is a Mexican state experiencing a very similar situation in terms of moribund languages, but considering the difference in the resources allocated to each to reverse language loss, the situations are quite different. There are, however, Mexican languages that are still alive and doing fairly well, such as Yucatec Maya, Huichol, and Isthmus Zapotec, among others—although this does not mean they are not endangered. Again, in one single region, such as in the Balsas region, one will find different "stages" or degrees of the language shift continuum simultaneously. These kinds of regions resist simple characterizations of language shift (Fishman, 1991).

Mexican multilingualism can be characterized as a conflictive diglossic bilingualism. This means that bilingualism constitutes a historical stage leading to a new monolingualism or a substitutive bilingualism. In other words, the history of Mexican multilingualism can be summarized as the history of substitutive and diglossic bilingualism (Kloss, 1967) up until today.[5]

Notes on the history of Mexican multilingualism. In prehispanic Mesoamerica, Nahuatl was a lingua franca. This reflects the dominance that the Aztecs (or *Mexicah*) acquired only 300 years before the new invaders arrived on the Mexican plateau, usurping others' cultural traditions and presenting those cultures as their own. There were at least two types of diglossia in such a remote era. The first type of diglossia was an internal diglossia, resembling Ferguson's original definition, where two varieties of a single language correspond to high and low (complementary) functions, one linked to the public spheres and the other linked to the informal spheres. In classical Nahuatl, one even finds terminology that indexes this diglossic relationship: *Macehuallatolli*[6] "the speech of the peasants" versus the *pillatolli*[7] "the speech of the nobles." Most of the vast number of documents that exist in Nahuatl, the collection of which rivals the greatest document collections worldwide, are in the high variety of the language (Lockhart, 1992).

The second type of diglossia involves Nahuatl versus other indigenous languages. This conflict is expressed in the name Nahuatl itself, which means "agreeable, pleasant, clear sound, i.e., THE language." Compare this to most terms that the Aztecs imposed on other ethnic groups, such as the *Altepetl*,[8] discussed in more detail in this article, whom they called the *Cohuixca*, which means "lizard." Other examples of this practice are *otomi* "barbarian," *popoloca* "unintelligible," *chontal* "foreigner," and *pipil* "baby talk." Nevertheless, owing to factors such as greater isolation, lack of rapid communication, and the prevalence of polytheistic societies, the prehispanic situation was probably quite stable in terms of multilingualism, especially when compared to colonial and modern situations.

From the very beginning of their invasion, Spanish *conquistadores* took advantage of Nahuatl's status as a lingua franca, a function that it fulfilled during the whole colonial period and even until the late eighteenth century. It was with the emergence of the Mexican State in the nineteenth century that the most

dramatic shift to Spanish as the national standard language occurred. This shift required displacing a considerable number of indigenous languages (Cifuentes & Pellicer, 1989). Nahuatl was then confined to isolated regions and compartmentalized into the oral realm, thus interrupting its (alphabetic) written tradition. Nevertheless, some communities have found ways to endure and survive, adapting themselves to the ever-changing conditions imposed by the mainstream politics of assimilation. This is very much the case in the region in which we developed our project (Flores Farfán, 1999a,b).

The Nahuas Today

In Mexico today, Nahuatl is still spoken by between one and two million people, depending on one's source. Whatever the exact figure, there is no doubt that Nahuatl is the indigenous language with the largest number of speakers in the country. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Nahuatl is a compact or uniform language with no dialectalization, as is the case with Yucatec Maya in the Yucatec Peninsula. Most Nahua regions have no contact between them, a fact that has, as we have suggested, prompted some authors (Suárez, 1983) to speak of a dozen Nahua languages. Traditionally, these regions cover a vast territory of the Mexican republic, ranging from San Luis Potosi in the North, passing through the central region in and around Mexico City (with its almost extinct dialects), including the state of Morelos, and reaching the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca or Chiapas with small Nahuatl-speaking communities. Moreover, owing to recent migration patterns, one can find Nahuas as far as Sonora in the northern part of Mexico, in Arizona, California, Texas, and even on the US-Canada border. The highest concentration of Nahua population is found in the la Huasteca region. As for the language shift continuum versus language maintenance, the closer one gets to an urban area, the more Spanish influence one finds, as opposed to the isolated rural regions, where the highest Nahua concentration is encountered.

Given the endangered status of all Nahuatl varieties, efforts that meet the needs of language teaching, revitalization, maintenance, and development are particularly important. Even languages as widely spoken as Nahuatl are susceptible to rapid loss. The constellation of factors that produce language shift include:

1. The lack of effective support for the linguistic and cultural resources of Nahuatl-speaking communities.
2. Migration of Nahuatl speakers to cities in Mexico and the United States, where continual contact with Spanish and English speaking populations necessitates the development of sociolinguistic competencies in those languages.
3. The prejudicial attitudes that still exist toward most indigenous languages.
4. The lack of contact of at times extremely reduced numbers of speakers of different isolated Nahuatl dialects. This implies that the actual linguistic community for any one Nahuatl variety is often quite small and thus susceptible to rapid language shift.

5. The swiftly decreasing rate of intergenerational transmission, especially to children.

All of these factors create the scenario for a possible rapid loss of proficiency in Nahuatl within a few generations. In the Balsas region, as in many other areas, one finds all these types of situations.

The Case of the Balsas Nahuas

Balsas Nahuas are located in the state of Guerrero (see Flores Farfán, 1999a). The Balsas region is an area that includes around 20 Nahuatl-speaking *pueblos* with a total population of approximately 50,000 people. The Nahuatl spoken there is generally considered a central dialect, although this is probably an over-simplification. A more precise and specific classification is still required to do justice to the different varieties spoken in the region (Flores Farfán, 1999a). Located along the banks of the Balsas river basin, this is a semi-desert area with low agricultural productivity. This geographical fact has prompted the communities to look for other means of livelihood, such as the production of a number of different types of crafts, including the famous amate (painted bark "paper"), pottery, and carved wooden masks. All these products have become fairly successful in the tourist market. Balsas Nahuas are indigenous entrepreneurs, travelling to almost any tourist site in Mexico, mostly as itinerant merchants, where many individuals sell their crafts.

The Balsas Nahuas are a unique example of an indigenous group that has overcome economic and political threats of extinction. In this sense, speaking of revitalization, maintenance, or development in this region implies speaking of the different survival strategies that the Nahuas have developed in order to oppose complete, at times forced, acculturation, accommodating to the National society's constraints (e.g., the capitalist market's pressures). In this context, the role of schools has been more to promote assimilation rather than to vindicate indigenous languages. Ironically, the successful resistance of the construction of a long planned hydroelectric dam in the region has produced more ethnic unity and linguistic awareness than has any official language policy, no matter how "bicultural" it might claim to be. In other words, the grassroots movement that opposes the State's intention to construct a hydroelectric dam in the Nahuas' territory has had more positive effects in terms of language revitalization and revival than any language planning efforts carried out in the past, no matter how authentic or well intentioned they might have been. Even long before that, there were elements that favoured the use of Nahuatl in the region, especially related to the affirmation of local identities and ritual ties.

In recent times, for economic reasons, a tradition of innovation has emerged in the Balsas region. Trade has reinforced multidialectal competencies between different communities and revealed that dialectal unintelligibility is not an issue for inter-regional communication. Thus, it is likely that for any revitalization, maintenance, and language development programs to become successful, a deeply rooted civil society movement has to be involved (Fishman, 1991). To the

contrary, the Mexican State's official policies toward indigenous minorities have basically promoted transitional bilingualism and an image of indigenous peoples that reproduces and perpetuates a museographical, mystified identity. These policies have little to do with, for example, the Zapatista's distressing realities or the Nahuas Balsas people's struggle to survive.

Yet, as suggested, in the Balsas River valley, there is a great degree of variability in the strength of language maintenance, ranging from total language shift to high rates of language vitality. In the last generation, some communities have suffered a significant loss of their Native tongues in household use, which is a situation that threatens the linguistic competence in Nahuatl of the next generation. Thus, it is extremely important that linguistic research and the preparation of teaching materials begin in those communities with present generations of speakers, something that our present project has started to develop.

Current Efforts to Revitalize, Maintain, and Develop Balsas Nahuatl

This project has gone through different stages. Although it started over a decade ago, it has only been in the last five years that efforts to develop materials and to apply them to intercultural education have become effective. Given the context briefly alluded to, in which schools are thought of as places to acquire Spanish according to community members' expectations, efforts designed to enhance the use of the indigenous languages are not exclusively or even primarily based in schools or on written media. One of the project's goals is to produce a set of materials based on the concept of interculturality. As I have described elsewhere (Flores Farfán, 1999a), the language planning we are currently engaged in works with a variety of media (books, audiotapes, Internet, video) on themes of Nahuatl language and culture, producing popular cultural materials in bilingual form (Nahuatl and Spanish). Most important, such materials are useful to a wide audience, namely, people in the indigenous and mainstream populations looking to establish a respectful and productive dialogue between different sectors of Mexican society, especially with children.

Based on the extensive work previously done on language contact in Mexico (Flores Farfán, 1999b) and on the diagnosis provided therein in terms of language maintenance and shift, two representative communities at the extreme poles of the language shift continuum have been identified. They have been targetted for implementation of pilot revitalization and reversal (Xalitla) and maintenance and development (Oapan) interventions.

Cleofas Ramírez Celestino, a Native linguist and artist, and I have been collaborating for over two decades. As part of our intervention proposal, we have produced (and are in the process of producing) a number of reading and audio materials that we give to the communities for their use in everyday life. In order to do this, we visit the communities during key moments in the pueblos ceremonial life, such as during the Saint Patron's festivities, when most of the community members are in town. In conjunction with local teachers and local authorities, we organize a workshop as part of the celebration, to which the whole community is invited, especially the children. When a considerable num-

ber of people have arrived for the workshop, we show them the couple of videos in Nahuatl that we have produced.[9] The videos are narrated in Nahuatl and, of course, the workshops are also conducted in the indigenous tongue. We then ask the audience to participate, asking them to tell us if they understood the story or asking them to retell it. This allows us to warm up the atmosphere and produce a non-threatening environment. As an incentive, those who actively participate receive a gift consisting of one of the books or tapes on which the videos are based. We continue the workshop by organizing a riddle contest. Those who guess the riddles also receive prizes in the form of riddle or storybooks along with their corresponding tapes.

All these workshop activities have a number of advantages and are used for different purposes. For instance, the workshops allow us to introduce alphabetic writing through visual means that are culturally sensitive (the amate de historias, "amates that tell stories," which is a Native way of writing) without over-emphasizing literacy while at the same time recreating "old" traditions with new technologies. Moreover, showing the videos also stimulates participants to re-evaluate the cultural traditions and the language using media to which children are particularly attracted. Another interesting outcome of the workshops is the kind of on-the-spot research it allows us to do. Interacting with workshop participants gives us some insight into the endangered status of Nahuatl, especially in communities with which we are just starting to work.

The workshop materials are based on relevant cultural themes and employ genres that are not only familiar, but are also highly valued by community members themselves (e.g., riddles and tales). These materials, such as the amates de historia, are culturally sensitive to the community's own ways of describing their everyday and ceremonial life. What we are doing is adapting older cultural technologies to different new media, following the communities' inclinations toward developing a culture of innovation (Amith, 1995).

The results of this approach have so far been extremely stimulating. Our approach has allowed us to open up new environments for language use, making available a series of language materials for everyday use in the households, which should stimulate intergenerational transmission. It has also allowed us to integrate more Native speakers into the team involved in the production of materials and the implementation of the workshops, including young speakers. In this sense, the atmosphere created by the workshops has enabled us to identify speakers who can reactivate their use of the language, especially adolescents and young children who, from a superficial observation, would otherwise be thought of as monolingual in Spanish. This is especially true in communities with a high degree of language shift, such as Xalitla, where we have witnessed the reactivation of Nahuatl in two young ladies who have now been integrated into the team of actors who narrate the videos in Nahuatl. This is part of an empowering model that we will continue enhancing in the future.

The Future

Technologies for recording and transmitting texts have greatly improved in recent years and have also become relatively inexpensive. Their ability to create interactive language learning tools and to reproduce audio and written materials and their accessibility will no doubt empower speakers and aid their efforts to revitalize their language through teaching and study, which could eventually lead to maintenance and even development of the use of the Nahuatl language. These are goals in language planning that we have started to realize through a series of activities aimed at developing culturally appropriate strategies to reverse language death.

Because the colonial period documentation on Nahuatl far exceeds that of any other language indigenous to the Americas, work on modern Nahuatl can include comparisons with historical Nahuatl. For instance, dictionaries on contemporary Nahuatl could be produced that compare modern forms to those recorded at the beginning of Nahuatl-Spanish contact in the sixteenth century. Recorded texts based on this rich wealth of data, as well as other pedagogical materials in Nahuatl, could be made readily available not only to researchers and students of the language, but, most of all, to Native speakers interested in preserving and promoting their language and their cultural heritage.

Last, but not least, despite the wide range of experiences of indigenous peoples in different contexts (as migrant labourers, artisans, political activists, etc.), there are virtually no texts that document these experiences in their own language and that depict their modern culture, such as the amate tradition. The viability of the present language can best be enhanced through the development of research and learning materials together with Native speakers, who can give voice to their own language and words and then translate them for use by non-speakers. This would provide a foundation for future efforts directed at Nahuatl language study and maintenance and, most of all, give Native speakers access to both linguistic research and language teaching.

We plan to continue our work by carrying out intensive workshops in the community of San Agustín Oapan—the Balsas River valley community most oriented to Nahuatl—with the participation of Native speakers of the language. During the workshops, we will focus on working with Nahuatl-speaking participants to develop the most suitable orthography for the recording of their language so that materials similar to those already in use in other communities can be produced. We hope that the workshops will lead to intensive work on the recording, transcription, discussion, translation, analysis, and illustration of Nahuatl texts dealing with the Nahuas' culture and language. The materials gathered will complement similar material obtained in the Nahuatl-speaking villages of the Balsas. These materials will be worked on (transcribed, analyzed, and translated) during the field workshops. They will then be edited and prepared for diffusion and pedagogical use in close collaboration with Native speakers after each workshop in Oapan. The Native scholars will subsequently participate as guest instructors in the pedagogical activities in which we are presently involved [i.e., the Nahuatl Language Seminar at Centro de Investigaciones y

Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City]. These scholars will also form the beginnings of a community oriented team of linguists committed to revitalization, reversal, maintenance, and development initiatives in the whole Nahua region—efforts that are extremely urgent in the face of linguistic and cultural extinction. All of the collected materials will be used in these pedagogical efforts, prepared for publication and distribution, and made available to other Native peoples, as well as researchers.

Notes

[1]As Henze and Davis (1999) state: "There are a number of terms in use to refer to the work of creating more speakers and wider use of a minority language. Some of these are Reverse [sic] Language Shift or RLS (Fishman, 1991), language regenesis, language renewal, language revitalization, language maintenance, and language preservation. While some terms are governed by certain conditions (e.g., maintenance is an inappropriate term for a language that is no longer in use, and preservation may bring to mind... museums rather than a living language), other terms may simply be a matter of preference" (p. 18).

[2]Revitalization is probably borrowed from biology (e.g., in Arizona, the beaver is being revitalized by reintroducing it in the San Pedro River; in Canada, the buffalo has been returned to the Plains by Native tribes), and that is the more precise meaning of the term. But revitalization can also mean different things, ranging from promoting fairly vital living languages, to a use that attributes a negative, mystifying meaning to the word, linked to revivalist movements worldwide (Fishman, 1991). All of this reminds us of the need for more precise definitions of this and related terms. The set also includes "preservation," which for some might have a museographical overtone (see Note 1), "maintenance," "reversal" (Fishman 1991), and "restoration," which implies a dead language. As we will suggest in the case study reported in this article, in a situation where the language is fairly vital, the term "development" is the one that most clearly evokes and lends itself to conscious language planning efforts.

[3]In the Catalan situation, which constitutes one of the most successful experiences of language planning (Fishman, 1991), such a divorce does not really exist (sociolinguistics there is meaningfully conceived and labelled as militant sociolinguistics). Authors such as Aracil criticize the predominant approach of linguistics that overemphasizes language per se (personal communication). For him, this is another form of *ism*, such as academicism, or what he terms *lenguajismo*, which is a label that captures and criticizes the over-emphasis given to language as an abstract, idealized structure and not as an everyday human practice.

[4]Bearing in mind that all languages in Mexico are endangered, three major linguistic families still prevail: (1) Uto-Aztec [beyond Mexico this includes among others Arizona's Hopi, Yoreme (Yaqui), and Tohono O'odam]; (2) Maya (over 30 languages, most of them in Guatemala); and (3) Otomanguean (more than a dozen languages with high degrees of diversification, most of them in Oaxaca (Suárez, 1983).

[5]For a recent detailed study on language politics in Mexico see King (1994).

[6]*Macehualli* "commoner, peasant" and *tlatolli* "speech, discourse, talk."

[7]*Pilli* "member of the dominant group" and *tlatolli* "speech, discourse, talk."

[8]The word *Altepetl* covers much more than what its traditional translation as "city, town" suggests. It refers to a separate ethnic identity defined by clear territorial and political differences, even when comprising speakers of the same language, as is the case of the *Mexicah* and the *Cohuixca* (Lockhart, 1992).

[9]These videos recover the oral narrative and pictographic traditions of the communities (e.g., the opossum, the mermaid, riddles). Together with a team of professionals, and based on Ramírez Celestino's illustrations made *ex profeso* for the videos, we adapt the existent books to a cinematography script to produce high quality digital animation videos using, for example, three-dimensional imagery and other high-tech graphics tools.

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